

**NORTH CAROLINA STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE**  
Office of Archives and History  
Department of Cultural Resources

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**

**Griffith-Sowers House**

Salisbury vicinity, Rowan County, RW0971, Listed 9/9/2009  
Nomination by Davyd Foard Hood  
Photographs by Davyd Foard Hood, May 2009



Garden façade view



Entrance façade view

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

### 1. Name of Property

historic name Griffith-Sowers House

other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

### 2. Location

street & number 5050 Statesville Boulevard

☐ not for publication N/A

city or town Salisbury

☒ vicinity

state North Carolina

code NC

county Rowan

code 159

zip code 28147

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination  
☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of  
Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set for in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  
☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally  
☐ statewide ☒ locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See Continuation sheet  
for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

☐ entered in the National Register.

☐ See continuation sheet

☐ determined eligible for the  
National Register.

☐ See continuation sheet

☐ determined not eligible for the  
National Register.

☐ removed from the National  
Register.

☐ other,

(explain:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

|       |
|-------|
| _____ |
| _____ |
| _____ |
| _____ |

Griffith-Sowers House  
Name of Property

Rowan County, NC  
County and State

## 5. Classification

### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☒ private  
☐ public-local  
☐ public-State  
☐ public-Federal

### Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- ☒ building(s)  
☐ district  
☐ site  
☐ structure  
☐ object

### Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in count.)

| Contributing | Noncontributing |            |
|--------------|-----------------|------------|
| 4            | 1               | buildings  |
| 1            | 0               | sites      |
| 0            | 0               | structures |
| 0            | 0               | objects    |
| 5            | 1               | Total      |

### Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

### Number of Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

## 6. Function or Use

### Historic Functions

(Enter categories and subcategories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

DOMESTIC/secondary structure

AGRICULTURAL/ agricultural outbuilding

### Current Functions

(Enter categories and subcategories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

OTHER/storage

VACANT/NOT IN USE

## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Colonial Revival

### Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation brick

walls wood

roof slate

other brick

wood

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Griffith-Sowers House

Name of Property

Rowan County, NC

County and State

## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☐ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** moved from its original location.
- ☐ **D** a cemetery.
- ☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ **F** a commemorative property
- ☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

### Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

### Period of Significance

Ca.1930-1962

### Significant Dates

Ca. 1930

1940

1960-1962

### Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked)

N/A

### Cultural Affiliation

N/A

### Architect/Builder

Bloxam, Percy---architect

Lazenby, Alfred Ross---builder

### Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

### Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

### Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ Previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

### Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State Agency
- ☐ Federal Agency
- ☐ Local Government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Name of repository:

Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, NC

Griffith-Sowers House  
Name of Property

Rowan County, NC  
County and State

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Approx. 30 acres

### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

|   |           |               |                |
|---|-----------|---------------|----------------|
| 1 | <u>17</u> | <u>538480</u> | <u>3952690</u> |
|   | Zone      | Easting       | Northing       |
| 2 | <u>17</u> | <u>539060</u> | <u>3952640</u> |

|   |           |               |                |
|---|-----------|---------------|----------------|
| 3 | <u>17</u> | <u>539050</u> | <u>3952130</u> |
|   | Zone      | Easting       | Northing       |
| 4 | <u>17</u> | <u>538520</u> | <u>3952170</u> |

☐ See continuation sheet

### Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

### Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Davyd Foard Hood  
organization \_\_\_\_\_ date 25 August 2008  
street & number Isinglass, 6907 Old Shelby Road telephone 704/462-1847  
city or town Vale state NC zip code 28168

### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

#### Continuation Sheets

#### Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

#### Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

#### Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

### Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name John Luther Sowers/Charles Lewis Sowers  
street & number 5050 Statesville Blvd./414 Bethel Drive telephone 704/633-4170  
704/636-2434  
city or town Salisbury state NC zip code 28147/28144

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listing. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*)

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P. O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20303.

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National Park Service

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Griffith-Sowers House  
Rowan County, North Carolina

## 7. NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

### Overview

The Griffith-Sowers House, a large, flush-sheathed, two-story-with-attic frame Colonial Revival-style country house, stands in the generally rural landscape of central Rowan County, about seven miles west/northwest of Salisbury, the county seat. When built in ca.1930-1932, the house (#2) was located on a slight rise in the gently rolling Piedmont landscape and on a tract of 137.85 acres that had comprised a Kepley family farm acquired in 1930 by James Francis Griffith and his wife. The Kepley property and the residual house grounds lie on the north side of Statesville Boulevard (US 70) and in the northwest corner of its junction with Kepley Road (SR 1953). The house is positioned to advantage, slightly to the east of center on the holding. The acreage then, as now, was about evenly divided between cleared, open fields and meadows and natural woodlands of mostly deciduous trees. A one-story frame farm house, earlier occupied by members of the Kepley family, stood on the extreme east edge of the acreage and faced east to Kepley Road. This expansive pastoral landscape provided an appropriate setting for the Griffith house and gave it a degree of separateness, isolation even, from the traditional, less architecturally sophisticated farmsteads in this part of Rowan County. Today, it protects the house from the suburban residential construction that has spread west from Salisbury along the path of US 70.

After Mr. and Mrs. Griffith defaulted on a mortgage, the property was put up at auction on 8 April 1933 and bid in by Jesse Lewis Sowers. By that time Alfred Ross Lazenby, the Salisbury builder, had completed the exterior of the house, placed it under a slate roof, and finished the interior with partitions, sub-flooring, and lath, and had it ready for plastering. The finishing of the interior was accomplished in stages from 1934, when Mr. Sowers, a bachelor, and his parents occupied the west wing, through 1940 when Mr. Sowers, his wife and two sons came to live in the rooms of the west half of the main block, as a separate second household, until 1962, when the rooms of the east wing were finished and occupied. With the death of Mr. Sowers's mother, Susan Miller Sowers, in January 1963, the house became the intended single-family residence.

Also located on the grounds of the Griffith-Sowers House are three outbuildings and a studio, which are all of wood construction and erected between ca. 1934 and ca. 1972. A poultry house (#4) of ca. 1934-1940, barn (#5) of ca. 1934-ca. 1960, and a small storage building (#6) of ca. 1940-1950 are located in a cluster about two-hundred feet west of the Griffith-Sowers House. John Luther Sowers' studio (#3), a one story building of ca. 1972 with later additions, is located about midway between the house and the agricultural outbuildings.



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The acreage included in this nomination, about thirty acres, represents the east-central portion of the original 137.85 acre tract on which the house was built. The diminishment to the present, residual estate acreage of about 119.50 acres held by the owners, sons of Jesse Lewis Sowers, of which the nomination acreage is a one-quarter part, reflects two circumstances. In 1943 a twelve-acre tract, on the west side of Walnut Branch, somewhat isolated from the main acreage, was sold to a neighboring landowner. Beginning in 1949 Mr. and Mrs. Sowers executed a series of right-of-way agreements, easements, and sales of three very small parcels for the construction of underground natural gas pipelines and metering stations that continued through Mr. Sowers death in 1988 to 2002, two years before Mrs. Sowers death. The underground lines generally represent no visual intrusion in the landscape and lay below mowed grass cover. However, the two metering station complexes located on both conveyed acreage and easements and partially astride rights of way, on the east edge of the grounds and adjoining Kepley Road, are incompatible with the pastoral character of the estate grounds. The acreage on which they are located and the right-of-way that carries between them to its crossing under Kepley Road is excluded from this nomination.

## Inventory List

1. The Grounds of the Griffith-Sowers House  
ca. 1934 to the present  
Contributing site

The estate grounds of the Griffith-Sowers House included in this nomination comprise a generally rectangular-shaped tract of about thirty acres on the north side of Statesville Boulevard (US 70) and in the northwest corner of its junction with Kepley Road, which carries off the north side of the boulevard in an elongated arc to the northeast to Goodson Road. The grounds, comprising the nominated acreage, are bound on the south by a line that carries generally east to west from Kepley Road, diagonally along an underground pipeline easement to a point where it turns and carries west in a straight line to the drive, there it incorporates the asphalt drive and its flanking hedgerow leading north off Statesville Boulevard, and then continues in a gentle curve to the west/northwest on the south edge of a woodland to a point north of an historic corner. The west boundary then carries north from this point to join a dry creek bed, and it follows in this creek bed to the northwest corner of the nominated acreage. The east border of the estate, also a generally straight line, carries along the west edge of Kepley Road. The north border carries along a farm lane from the west edge of Kepley Road into a woodland, where it joins a spring-fed creek that flows in a generally westerly fashion through a woodland to its junction with the above-noted dry creek.

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Griffith-Sowers House  
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The Griffith-Sowers House stands in the near center of the nominated acreage in the gently-rolling Piedmont terrain and on a slight rise in the topography. The asphalt paved entrance drive is nearly centered on the Statesville Boulevard frontage and carries north in a generally straight line, bordered on its east side by cedars growing along an old fence line. The drive then passes through a woodland, and after crossing a shallow spring-fed/usually dry stream, it continues slightly off its north/south axis and upgrade to the northwest to the west side of the house. Here it forms a loop beside the west service wing where a two-vehicle garage is located on the ground floor.

The grounds immediately around the house comprise both open and tree-shaded lawn that is informally planted with trees, shrubs, and other ornamentals favored during the period of significance. These include magnolias, crepe myrtles, oaks, pines, dogwoods, maples, and towering deodora cedars. Flowering and evergreen shrubs enhance the front lawn where a border of low evergreens carries along its south front in a line generally parallel with the façade. This border both defines the lawn and sets it apart from the family vegetable garden in a chosen, fertile plot south of the lawn and on the east side of the drive where it is partially framed by an ornamental split-rail fence. The house's rear lawn is defined by the path of a farm lane, separating it from the deciduous native woodland to the north; it carries on a generally east west axis, parallel with the two-story portico, and echoes the evergreen shrub border on the front. To the east of the house, at the edge of a small grove, are several pecan trees and an aged pear tree that is the lone survivor of the small family orchard. The Griffith-Sowers House, the studio, and the three agricultural outbuildings are flanked on the east, south, and west by meadows and former pastures that also are now cut for hay. They are flanked by woodlands on the north.

The remaining acreage of the Griffith-Sowers House comprises meadows and woodlands that, like those noted here, reflect patterns of cultivation and use in the twentieth century. After cotton ceased to be grown on the farm in the early 1950s, virtually all of the cleared fields were used either as pastures for grazing or as meadows for grass or clover hay. Today, this historic patchwork of meadows and woodlands remains as the expansive setting of the Griffith-Sowers House and insulates it from the modern changes that are altering the Rowan County landscape beyond its borders. The site of the old Kepley farmhouse, used as a tenant house from 1933 to 1992, when it was demolished, retains little sign of its existence and now has a grass cover.

2. The Griffith-Sowers House  
ca.1930-32, 1934, 1940-42, 1948-49, 1958, 1960-62, 1963  
Contributing building

The Griffith-Sowers House, designed by Percy Bloxam, an architectural engineer, in 1930 and completed on the exterior and brought to a readiness for plastering on the interior by Salisbury builder



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Alfred Ross Lazenby in 1932, is a large frame Colonial Revival-style house whose elevations are sheathed with flush siding. The plasterwork and interior finish were executed in stages to the original plans and specifications with but minor exception between 1934 and 1962. The two-story-with-attic house, which faces south, stands on a common bond brick foundation, enclosing a partial basement, and it is covered with a slate roof. The house has a five-part plan composed of a dominant five-bay wide center block, covered by a side-gable roof, that is linked by shallow one-bay wide hyphens to its flanking, recessed, perpendicular gable-front two-story wings, which are two bays in width. The design of the house, its finish, and its fenestration are defined by an insistent symmetry, except that the east wing has a lesser depth and projection on the rear (north) elevation than the west service wing.

## Exterior

The south-facing façade of the Griffith-Sowers House is eleven bays wide and designed with a hierarchy of parts that creates a handsome, unified composition. This elevation, like the others, rises from a molded sill board and it is enframed by fitted cornerboards. The main block, just under fifty feet in width, has a five-bay arrangement on its first and second stories with the entrance, sheltered by a classical one-bay, one-story hip-roof porch. Tuscan columns support its full, molded entablature. (A balustrade on the porch roof, appearing on the plans, was never built.) The porch has a terra cotta tile floor and tile-covered steps that descend to a small brick landing across the front of the porch. Here a flagstone walk carries west from the terrace to the drive. The molded entrance surround enframes a six-panel door flanked by beveled, diamond-shaped paned sidelights, above molded panels, and a beveled glass fanlight. The window openings here, and throughout the house, have plain board surrounds with molded projecting drip caps, and hold six-over-six sash. The window openings on the main block and the wings are fitted with two-panel blinds. At the attic level a trio of dormers are sheathed with slate shingles and finished with molded cornice returns that compliment the arch-headed openings with keystones holding eight-pane windows. The house's molded eaves have shallow returns on their gable ends, and they are fitted with copper gutters and downspouts.

The east and west gable ends of the main block are dominated by bold brick chimneys, laid up in a one-to-seven bond. Their straight shafts are flanked by windows on the first and second stories and by quarter-round windows at the attic level. On the west gable end, there are smaller complementing openings at the basement level fitted in brick wells with metal windows. The front walls of the single-bay hyphens are recessed behind the northernmost tiers of windows on the respective gable ends, and they contain small six-over-six sash windows on both stories that (mostly) illuminate bathrooms. The two-story gable-front wings project forward of the hyphens by almost two and one-half feet. They have paired windows on the first and second levels and demi-lune louvers at the attic level.

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The east and west elevations of the wings vary in appearance because of their different depths and respective uses. The east elevation of the east wing, which contains a large reception room on its first story and a bedroom and bathroom above, has a symmetrical three-bay arrangement on each level. The west service wing has a more complicated elevation, with different arrangements in the respective south and north halves. In the north half, two large paired garage openings fitted with over-head doors, are positioned at ground level to provide vehicular access to the two-stall garage, while a conventional door is positioned beside them on the south for pedestrian entrance to the garage. This arrangement, which projects from the wall, reflects a 1963-64 remodeling of the earlier three-stall garage, whose openings were too narrow for larger, modern automobiles. Two windows are positioned on the second story above the garage doors. The south half of this elevation is symmetrical with single windows flanking a brick flue stack on each level. However, on the first story a door opening into the kitchen is located beside and above the garage door. It is accessed by brick steps rising to a brick stoop. At the basement level pendant window openings are positioned on both the south and west elevations of the service wing. These three openings are recessed in brick wells and they hold metal windows.

The rear (north) elevation is dominated by the engaged two-story hexastyle portico, which carries across the seven-bay elevation of the main block and is flanked by the gable fronts of the projecting wings. This three-part composition is achieved through the architectural incorporation of the hyphens into the main block. The portico, which is essentially a grand loggia, has a brick-paved floor, tall wood Tuscan columns, and centered brick steps that descend to the lawn. The columns at the east and west ends have complementing pilasters on the protected wall of the main block. Here, in the center bay on the first story, a door flanked by sidelights opens into the house's center hall. Above, on the second story a complementing, but arch-headed, opening contains a three-part window and a fanlight, incorporating a demi-lune window, which illuminates the stair landing in the hall. Its form also echoes that of the center entrance on the façade. (On the 1930 plans Mr. Bloxam proposed to link these first- and second-story features by a columned frontispiece, framing the first-story entrance, which would support a balustrade, whose upper railing would be level with the sill of the second-story window. The columns for this doorway treatment, manufactured by the Somerset Door and Column Company of Somerset, Pennsylvania, and delivered here in 1932, remain in their shipping crates in the attic. Complementing windows on both stories in the flanking three bays to each side illuminate the respective first- and second-story T-plan halls. A conventional door at the east end of the portico opens into the proposed music room in the east wing.

The north gable ends of the wings have a general but varying symmetry. On the east wing large single openings are centered in each level. On the first story the opening and its treatment repeats that described above on the second story of the main block. Above, the rectangular opening has a centered six-over-six sash window flanked by two-over-two sash sidelights. A demi-lune louver in the attic

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echoes the inscribed feature in the fanlight. On the west wing paired small windows on the first story provide daylight for the garage while pendant conventional windows on the second story illuminate the proposed maid's room that is now Mr. Luther Sowers' sewing room.

## Interior

The interior of the Griffith-Sowers House has a generally symmetrical plan, reflecting its exterior design, that is fixed on an expansive T-shaped hall; the stem of the tee contains the stair linking the two principal levels of the main block, while the top of the tee is an elegant gallery-like space on both levels, which is illuminated by the windows under the rear portico. Except for the kitchen and bathrooms, the flooring throughout the house is oak or maple (in the east wing) and the walls and ceilings are plastered, except for the two paneled reception rooms and the bedroom in the east wing. The architectural woodwork, trim, and six-panel doors replicate that of the 1930 plans and are essentially consistent although of different dates of installation. The plan and finish reflects that shown and described on the 1930 plans and specifications except for the use of estate-cut poplar and other woods for paneling in the proposed living room, music room, and east wing bedroom, the combination of the proposed pantry and breakfast room in the west wing into a single, larger dining room, the elimination of the butler's pantry and its finish as a service hall, like that of the hall, the decision not to install built-in features in the study and sewing room whose use by the Sowers differed from that proposed for the Griffiths, and the rich plaster cornice molding proposed for the first-story hall and reception rooms.

The plan of the Griffith-Sowers House clearly indicates, through an arrangement and size of its three first-story reception rooms, its design for a comfortable life and a generous hospitality including musicales; Mr. and Mrs. Griffith were both trained musicians, and he worked professionally in music for most of his adult life. The front door opens directly into the foot of the house's generous T-plan hall, where the staircase rises north along its west wall, in the stem of the tee. The stair has an unusually gentle rise to a wide landing, positioned below the second-story level. It has a round newel and shaped handrail, stained dark, which is carried on round white uprights. The handrail is echoed by a chair rail and a second handrail that carry with the rise up the west wall. The hall is also finished with a molded-top baseboard and a chair rail. This front part of the hall is flanked on the east and west by reception rooms of equal size, seventeen-feet wide and thirty-feet deep. Mr. Bloxam designated the east room as the Griffith's living room and the west room, nearest to the service wing, as the proposed dining room. Molded openings, intended to hold paired French doors, open into each room at the foot of the staircase. The Sowers used these rooms as a den and living room respectively. The white oak flooring and molded poplar paneling, milled from trees cut on the estate, was installed in the den in 1948-49. The vertically applied paneling rises from a molded baseboard to a molded cornice. The door

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and window surrounds, here and throughout the house, have a molded three-part composition. Poplar was also used to craft wood cornices for the room's four windows and the classically-detailed mantel on the room's east wall.

When Mr. Lazenby halted work on the house in about 1932, the finish of the proposed dining room was well advanced. The trio of glazed, built-in china cabinets in its southeast, southwest, and northeast corners were installed as was the Federal-style mantel. The cabinets have paired blind doors below a tall single, arch-headed sixteen-pane glazed door that opens onto display and storage shelves. These doors are flanked by molded pilasters that support urn finials which, in turn, flank a curved broken pediment. The mantel has fluted, molded pilasters that support a molded paneled frieze below a molded, projecting shelf. The fireplace is finished with glazed black tiles on the hearth and framing the firebox. A door at the west edge of the north wall opens into the service hall that connects to the kitchen. The deep molded cornice encircling the room was apparently installed by 1932, but it is not the rich cornice that appears on Mr. Bloxam's plans. The chair rail was added in 2006.

The top of the T-plan hall, positioned parallel with the loggia whose windows illuminate it, has the feeling of a "long gallery," one of a series of rooms in English country houses with which Mr. Bloxam would have been familiar. Doors from both of the front reception rooms open into it, and a door centered in its north wall, directly opposite the house's front door, opens onto the loggia. A door at its west end opens into the service hall connecting with the service wing, while paired glazed doors at its east end open into the house's third reception room. Occupying the entire first story of the east wing, it is labeled "Music Room" on the 1930 plan. In 1960-62 this room was finished with paneling milled from trees cut in the estate's woodlands. The flooring is maple, salvaged during a remodeling at the United States Post Office in Salisbury, and the paneling, comprised of single molded boards carrying vertically between a low baseboard and a molded cornice, is mostly poplar. The five conventional windows in this room are also fitted with wood cornices. The ceiling is covered with celotex. The Sowers family used this room located on the cooler east side of the house as a summer living room. Today it is used as uniform/costume storage by Luther Sowers. Immediately beside the doors linking this room with the hall is a door which opens into a powder room, located in the hyphen. Like the other bathrooms in the house, it has a ceramic tile floor and tall wainscot and fittings all of which date to 1958.

The west, service wing of the Griffith-Sowers House communicates with the main block through a service hall, opening off the west end of the T-plan hall. Its finish is essentially the same as that of the hall. It was originally designed to function as a butler's pantry. The alcove on its south side, contained in the hyphen linking the main block with the service wing, was to be fitted with a large sink unit, however, this area was partitioned as a utility room with a wall-hung sink. Doors in the west wall of

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the service hall open directly into the Sowers' dining room in the south part of the wing and the kitchen, positioned in the near center of the wing, between the dining room and the garage. The rectangular dining room has oak flooring, a tall baseboard, and plaster walls and ceiling. The molded chair rail was added in 2006 as were the paired pewter-finish chandeliers. The finish, cabinetry, and fittings of the kitchen are conventional and largely date to the 1963 remodeling, following on the death of Mr. Sowers' mother. In its northeast corner a service stair rises steeply to the north to the second story. A door opens under it, leading to a landing, from which access is available to the north to the garage or to the south to a staircase leading to the basement. The garage is a single large space with a concrete floor and unpainted wood sheathed walls.

The basement comprises three large rooms that are located below the kitchen and Sowers' dining room, the Sowers' living room, and the stem of the T-plan hall. The three rooms have exposed, unpainted brick walls and poured concrete floors. The basement is also accessible from a door opening under the house's main staircase onto a flight of painted wood steps, which descend into the easternmost room of the basement. This room, under the stair hall, is essentially a store room and has open wood shelves along its east wall. A door at the foot of the steps opens into the center space, under the living room, which is partitioned as a furnace room and a fuel (coal) room. A door in the west wall of the furnace room opens onto a passage under the west hyphen which connects with the laundry room under the south half of the west wing. The laundry room was used for both laundry and other domestic purposes, including canning and preserving. In 1963, when the kitchen was remodeled, cabinetry and appliances were relocated here for use.

The house's second-story plan closely replicates that of the first story except in the service wing. For a house of this size, the fact that the second story contains only three bedrooms *en suite* with bathrooms in the main block and east wing, and two smaller rooms, that were used as bedrooms for varying periods, and a bathroom in the west wing, is something of a surprise. The Griffiths were childless when the house was designed and there were no provisions made in the plan for children. Two bedrooms are positioned above the two reception rooms in the main block, and they repeat their generous size. In character they recall the spacious bedrooms of large Greek Revival-style plantation houses that functioned as bed-sitting rooms in the nineteenth century. The "Master Chamber" was devised above the proposed living room, and it and the "Bed Chamber" in the pendant position in the west part of the main block were both to have been fitted with fireplaces, explaining in part the size of the gable end chimneys. At some point, either during construction in the 1930s or afterward, the decision was made to forego fireplaces in these bedrooms. They are finished with oak floors, plaster walls and ceilings, consistent molded door and window surrounds, and six-panel doors with molded glass knobs. Both bedrooms have paired doors opening into cedar-lined closets. Both are *en suite* with well-detailed bathrooms with ceramic tile floors, tall wainscots, and tiled alcoves in which bathtubs are located. A

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small sewing room is positioned between the bedrooms at the south end of the T-plan hall, illuminated by the center-bay window on the façade. A ceiling-mounted pull-down stair is positioned near the door to the sewing room and it provides access to the attic, which is mostly floored with pine boards. The bedroom in the east wing, designated as a “Guest Chamber” on the 1930 plan, is smaller in size. The south third of the wing is occupied by its companion bathroom, a closet, and the bathroom for the “Master Chamber,” which incorporates the area of the hyphen. This bedroom is sheathed in wood paneling, a mix of gum, hickory, and poplar, milled from trees felled on the estate. Its maple flooring, like that in the room below, is reused flooring, salvaged by Mr. Sowers during a remodeling of the United States Post Office on West Innes Street.

On the 1930 plan the two rooms of unequal size in the west wing are labeled “Study” and “Maids Room”; they are located in the south and north ends of the wing, respectively. The proposed study, an upstairs’ sitting room, is positioned at the west end of the T-plan hall. A second door in the room’s north wall opens into the landing at the top of the service stair, which links the two rooms. There was no provision for a maid’s bathroom. In 1934 these two rooms were the first in the house to be finished and they were occupied by Mr. Sowers, a bachelor, and his parents. The bedrooms have oak flooring, plaster walls and ceilings, molded baseboards, three-part door and window surrounds, and six-panel doors with molded glass knobs. A bathroom was installed in the south ell of the reverse L-plan of the north bedroom, with its door opening onto the landing. It has vinyl flooring, a ceramic tile wainscot, its original corner tub, and other replacement fixtures.

All of the house’s second-story rooms, except the “Maids Room,” are linked by the T-plan hall whose design and illumination by the windows under the loggia render it the most architecturally interesting space on the second floor. The main staircase rises not to its level, but to a large rectangular landing positioned about two feet below. Three short flights of five steps rise from the east, south, and west sides of the landing to the second story. The stair railing ramps as it approaches the landing, carries east in front of it, and then continues with the south flight of steps under a molded arched opening. This arrangement, like the expansive gallery-like character of the first-story hall, reflects a luxurious use of space and gives pleasure to movement in the house.

3. John Luther Sowers Studio  
ca.1972, with additions in 1974, 1978, and 1984  
Noncontributing building

This sprawling one-story building has an appealing rustic, post-Modern character that derives from the combination of its additive construction, varied materials and finish, multiple metal roofs, six-over-six sash, and the use of earlier building materials, principally windows, to craft a space in which Luther

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Sowers works as an artist and craftsman. The essentially rectangular core of the studio, erected in about 1972 and covered with a side-gable roof that is partially raised on the south as a skylight, comprises the near center of the present building. In 1974 Mr. Sowers added a free-standing mostly concrete block rectangular building to the north that is sheathed with unpainted board-and-batten above the block walls and covered by both gable-front and shed roofs. This addition houses a forge that was utilized in the creation of the four panels for the doors of St. John's Church, Salisbury. In 1978 two additions were made including a rectangular shed-roof room on the south front and a large rectangular block, nearly the size of the original studio, added onto its west gable end. In 1984 Mr. Sowers linked the forge with the main studio by way of a shallow glazed passage, sheathed with board and batten and also enhanced with reused beveled-glass windows. The interior has a generally open plan with a sequence of work areas that reflect Mr. Sowers' employment of different mediums for sculpture, metal work, and other applications, including sword-making for his military costuming company, Anvil Arms.

4. Poultry House  
ca. 1934-1940  
Contributing building

The poultry house is a rectangular frame building comprised of two blocks of unequal size and height covered with sheet metal shed roofs. Their south-facing front elevations are fitted with board and rail doors and wide openings for sunlight and ventilation that are covered with mesh wire. The buildings are of simple, solid construction. They stand on rock piers and are sheathed with horizontal board siding. The interiors of both have wood floors, and the east block has had interior sheathing added when it came into later use as a feed room for the beef cattle operation. The poultry house has a two bay shed-roof addition on its east end that has been used for both sheltered work and storage. A smaller, more rudimentary shed has been added to the west side of the poultry house. The condition of the building has deteriorated through disuse, however, it is sound.

5. Barn  
ca. 1934 to ca. 1960  
Contributing building

The fabric and appearance of this large, generally rectangular frame building, covered by an expansive front gable roof with several shed extensions, reflects both its original construction in ca. 1934, when the Sowers family occupied the unfinished house, and a series of mostly undated additions made in the decades up to ca. 1960. While Jesse Lewis Sowers carefully recorded the expenditures for work on the Griffith-Sowers House, the Kepley tenant house, and the log cottage and the rental house outside the



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nomination boundary, as well as much of the furniture for both 209 South Ellis Street and his country house, he made but one entry in his ledger that appears to concern this building. It is "Built Cow Shed Addition (1960)." The cost was \$371.68. This mention relates to the construction of a two-part shed addition on the north side of the barn for the stabling, feeding, and penning of his Angus cattle and their calves. The broad south-facing front of the barn comprises seven principal bays, of which the three easternmost are believed to be the earliest. They are constructed of mostly salvaged materials brought here from an earlier barn on a Salisbury property. When necessary in this instance, as in the additions that followed, he also purchased lumber for certain needs, and cut pine trees on the property for rafters. This block and the additions are covered with sheet metal. The early barn was built as shelter for animals, then the family milch cows, as storage for feed, hay, straw, and other animal feed, for equipment storage, and as a sheltered work area. The reuse of multiple windows on the east end of the barn suggests its easternmost bay was first used as a work area, however, it was adapted later and came to include a ramp for loading cattle. The interior arrangement of the other bays, some of which have partition walls, and those that followed were likewise retained or changed through time to meet evolving agricultural needs. Four of the south-facing bays are open while three are enclosed with either vertical or horizontal sheathing. Sheet metal is also used for protective siding on the west and north elevations. The doors visible on the exterior and those inside are mostly board and rail. Today the parts of the building that are in use are used for equipment and vehicular storage.

6. Storage Building  
ca. 1940-1950  
Contributing building

This small somewhat deteriorated rectangular building, standing on stones, sheathed with German siding, and covered with a sheet metal shed roof appears to have been built for storage, however, its original use is unconfirmed. Possibly it was used for feed in connection with the nearby poultry house. The building has a board and rail door on its north front and a four-pane window on its west side.

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## 8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### Summary

The Griffith-Sowers House, a large two-story-with-attic frame country house with architectural features of both the Colonial Revival and Classical Revival styles standing on immediate grounds of about forty-four acres, seven miles from Salisbury, occupies an important and unique place in the architectural history of Rowan County, North Carolina. It was designed in 1930 by Percy Bloxam, an English-born, Salisbury-based engineer, for James Francis Griffith (1887-1960), a Salisbury musician, and his wife. Alfred Ross Lazenby began construction on the house either later that year or early in 1931; he had completed the exterior of the house and brought the interior to a readiness for plastering, when the Griffiths suffered financial reverses in 1932. In April 1933 the unfinished house and its grounds of 137.85 acres were put up for sale at the Rowan County Courthouse and bid in by Jesse Lewis Sowers (1904-1988), the Superintendent of Mails at the United States Post Office in Salisbury. He initially occupied the house in 1934, with his parents, which remained their residence, and in 1940 he returned to the house with his wife and two sons, the younger of whom remains in residence to the present. Between 1934 and 1962 Mr. Sowers completed the interior finish of the house in stages. With the death in 1963 of his mother, who maintained her own separate residence in the house's west wing, the house designed for Mr. and Mrs. Griffith became a single-family dwelling.

The Griffith-Sowers House meets National Register Criterion C and holds local significance in the area of architecture as an important example of interwar period Colonial Revival-style architecture and as one of two houses in the county associated with the country house movement of ca. 1890 to ca. 1940. Its period of significance begins ca. 1930, with the start of its construction and extends to 1962, when the interior was brought to completion, essentially to the original plans and specifications prepared by Mr. Bloxam, which remain in the house. The Griffith-Sowers House is the single known residence designed by Mr. Bloxam (1888-1943), an engineer who immigrated to the United States in 1920, established himself in Salisbury by 1923, and worked in partnership with Charlotte architect Willard G. Rogers from 1924 to 1926, when they designed at least three buildings for Catawba College. Mr. Bloxam worked alone professionally from 1926 into the mid to later 1930s when he relocated to Roxboro, North Carolina, where he died. Alfred Ross Lazenby (1867-1943), whose completion of the house was cut short by Mr. Griffith's financial reverses, was a prominent and widely-respected Salisbury contractor who established his reputation with the building of Egbert B. C. Hambley's Chateausque-style mansion in 1900-1903 and went on to build many Salisbury landmarks.

Although North Carolina boasts the largest and most elaborate country house built in the United States in Biltmore, the country house movement was limited in its scope in the state, and examples of country

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house architecture are few in number. The Reynolda and Graylyn estates in Winston-Salem are well-known examples of a limited development that also included Morrocroft in Mecklenburg County, the grand estate of North Carolina governor Cameron Morrison anchored by the 1927 mansion designed by Harrie T. Lindeberg, and Boxwood Lodge (NR, 1995), designed by Delano & Aldrich and completed in 1934, in Davie County. The Griffith-Sowers House is one of only two related houses built in Rowan County, both in the 1930s. Mr. Griffith's plans for a country estate, seen in the location of his new house on a desirable site in the near center of his acreage, at the end of a long drive and well out of public view, and the design of a grand two-story portico/loggia on the rear, where he and Mrs. Griffith and their guests would have enjoyed views over gardens and the countryside, did not come to fruition. Financial reverses halted construction on the house in 1932 and forced its sale in 1933. Although the rural estate envisioned by Mr. Griffith did not come to pass, the house planned as its seat was completed and survives as an important example of the Colonial Revival style and country house architecture in Rowan County.

## Historical Background

James Francis Griffith (1887-1960), for whom Percy Bloxam (1888-1943) prepared the plans of this house and for whom the renowned Salisbury contractor Alfred Ross Lazenby (1867-1943) undertook its construction, was a native of Salisbury and resided near the center of the city, at a block's remove from the crossing of Innes and Main streets, from his birth until 1928. He was the only surviving child of Dr. James Francis Griffith (1851-1908) and his wife, Mary Elizabeth Kluttz (1853-1928). Dr. Griffith, a native of North Carolina, came to Salisbury in about 1872 and engaged in the practice of dentistry with Dr. William F. Bason (1814-1889) who had established himself and his own dental practice here in the antebellum period. In 1878 Dr. Griffith married Mary Elizabeth Kluttz, a daughter of Caleb Kluttz (1812-1857), who served as sheriff of Rowan County from 1849 until his death, and the younger sister of Theodore Franklin Kluttz (1848-1918), a wealthy Salisbury merchant, industrialist, and member of the United States Congress (1899-1905).<sup>1</sup> In 1881 Dr. Griffith purchased the former residence and office quarters of Dr. Bason, located in the east corner of West Innes and North Church streets (Rowan Deeds, 59/338-40). Soon thereafter he erected a stylish late-Italianate house that is believed to have also housed his dental practice. The lot on which the Griffith House stood, opposite that of Reuben J. Holmes in the south corner of Innes and Church streets, was a desirable one in the Rowan County seat. On 16 May 1907 Dr. and Mrs. Griffith sold the front, greater portion of their property to the United States of America (Rowan Deeds, 111/410-412). The rectangular lot, measuring fifty-two feet on Innes Street and 140 feet on North Church Street, became the site of the handsome, Classical Revival-style United States Post Office and Court House.

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Apparently prior to the sale of the property to the United States, Dr. Griffith had his house moved to the back part of the lot, facing northwest onto Church Street. Dr. James Francis Griffith and his family occupied the house, then standing at 117 North Church Street, until his death on 16 July 1908. He left his widow and their son who remained her near constant companion until her death on 1 May 1928. Early in this period, from 1909 until its completion in 1911, the scene of the elegant marble-clad post office, being constructed on the site of his childhood home, was a daily experience for the young Francis Griffith. Twenty years later the two-story Corinthian columns supporting the building's loggia overlooking West Innes Street would have a rural echo in the two-story Tuscan portico on the rear elevation of the Griffith-Sowers House.

James Francis Griffith was educated in the Salisbury public schools and at Horner Military Academy in Oxford, North Carolina.<sup>2</sup> He was enrolled for a year, that of 1906-1907, at the University of North Carolina. In the 1910 *Salisbury City Directory* he and his mother are listed at 117 North Church Street; he was then a clerk at the Salisbury office of the Wachovia Loan and Trust Company. He retained his association with the bank through the 1910s and in the 1919-1920 edition of the city directory he was listed as a bookkeeper. Apparently, it was also in the 1910s (and possibly early 1920s) that he was in New York for periods, where he is said to have studied music and voice at Columbia University, today's Julliard School, and with "Dr. Mario Marafioti, voice specialist of the Metropolitan Opera and personal physician and advisor to the famed tenor Enrico Caruso (1873-1921)" (*Asheville Citizen*, 28 May 1960). While he served as a private music teacher for most of his adult life, his single academic position in higher education was that of director of the vocal department at the University of Alabama School of Music for the year of 1920-1921. Mr. Griffith returned to Salisbury and in the 1922-1923 edition of the city directory he is listed as a "vocal teacher." In the next edition of the directory, for 1924-1925, he was again cited as a voice teacher, tenor soloist, and supervisor of music in the city schools. In the subsequent editions of the city directory, published for 1926 and 1928-1929, he was simply identified as a "music teacher." His music studio was listed at 117-1/2 North Church Street.

Mr. Griffith's marriage on 9 June 1925 to Grace C. Watson (1900-1969), the daughter of Albert W. and Mary (Poole) Watson, in Greenville, South Carolina, was the first of three events in the 1920s that led to the construction of this house. She does not appear in the Griffith household in the 1926 Salisbury directory, however in the 1928-1929 directory Mr. and Mrs. Griffith appear alone. Mary Elizabeth Kluttz Griffith had died on 29 April 1928 and was buried beside her husband in Salisbury's Chestnut Hill Cemetery. Grace Griffith was mistress of her new home for a short period. On 25 September 1928 Frances and Grace Griffith sold the Griffith residence to the United States of America for \$18,000 (Rowan Deeds, 204/8). The house, which appeared in published postal views of the

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Salisbury Post Office and Court House, was pulled down and its grounds became the site of an ell extension to the federal facility.

At this distance the matter of where the Griffiths resided after the sale of the Griffith family house in 1928 remains unconfirmed as do the circumstances that prompted the couple to undertake the construction of a large country house in rural Rowan County, some seven miles west of central Salisbury. They died childless, and any public association with this house apparently ended when they lost the property in foreclosure. On 5 March 1930 the couple acquired a tract of 137.85 acres lying on the north side of "the new Statesville Road" (then North Carolina Highway 10 and today's U.S. 70), in the northwest corner of the junction of Kepley Road (SR 1953) and the highway (Rowan Deeds, 211/126). As of 5 March, the sellers, Theodore Baker Brown (1863-1941), Harold Allen (1883-1942) and Mary Edna (McCubbins) Rouzer (1882-1952), and Harold Allen Rouzer, trustee, had owned the property for only two weeks. They had received title to it by deeds from Frank Reid Brown and his wife, and from John L. Rendleman, receiver of Frank Reid Brown, dated 21 February and 1 March 1930, respectively (Rowan Deeds, 211/109-110). The purchase price was effectively the assumption of the mortgage on the property, executed by Frank Reid Brown and his wife to the Greensboro Joint Stock Land Bank, of \$3,822 plus interest since 1 January 1930. The acreage included the late-nineteenth century farmstead of Lawson Monroe Kepley (1857-1921), whose nineteenth-century one-story frame house and its outbuildings stood at the eastern edge of the tract, on the west side of Kepley Road.<sup>3</sup>

Apparently, the Griffiths immediately engaged Percy Bloxam to prepare plans for the large two-story Colonial Revival-style house. Mr. Bloxam (1888-1943), an English-born engineer who enjoyed a brief partnership with Charlotte architect Willard G. Rogers, beginning in 1924, had a practice in architectural and civil engineering in Salisbury from about 1924 until the mid-1930s. The surviving plans for the house, comprising eight sheets, bear the name of the client, J. Francis Griffith of Salisbury, and that of the designer, Percy Bloxam and Company, architectural and consulting engineers. Only one of the eight sheets bears a date. A sheet of detail drawings, for the finish of important built-in features and decorative finishes including the trio of glazed "Corner Closets" in the proposed dining room (now the living room), probably the last of the group to be finished, is dated 15 April 1930.<sup>4</sup> The typed specifications for the house, comprising eleven pages, identify Mr. Griffith as being of "Ridgecrest & Salisbury, North Carolina." Whether the Griffiths had also established a (summer) residence in Ridgecrest, a small town in Buncombe County where the Southern Baptist assembly grounds are located, or he and Mrs. Griffith had established a professional association in a region, where they would work and reside during the final decades of their lives, is uncertain. In any event, the couple's musical interests were well-expressed in their proposed suburban Salisbury residence. A "Music Room," measuring seventeen by thirty feet, occupied the first story of the

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mansion's east wing and was one of its three equal-sized reception rooms. Construction started either later in 1930 or in 1931.

On 31 December 1931 the Griffiths placed the property under a second mortgage as collateral for a part of an indebtedness of \$3,983.21 to Wachovia Bank and Trust Company (Rowan Mortgage Deeds, 118/156). Eight-hundred shares of North American Trust Company were also named in the deed as security for the loan. By the winter of 1932-1933 the Griffiths had defaulted on the loan by Wachovia Bank, and some \$1,700 plus interest was owed to the Greensboro Joint Stock Land Bank.<sup>5</sup> On 3 March 1933 the *Carolina Watchman* published a legal notice for the "Sale of Valuable Real Estate," comprising the 137.85 acres, to take place at the Rowan County Courthouse on Saturday, 11 March 1933, at twelve noon. The description of the property was essentially the same as that of the 1930 deed to the Griffiths. The advertisement carried no mention of either existing buildings on the tract or improvements the Griffiths had made. As of the date of foreclosure, the exterior of the grand flush-sheathed house had been completed, its slate roof laid down, and copper guttering installed. The interior partitions were in place, subflooring and some finish flooring installed, and, as Mr. Sowers recorded, the "Main Dwelling (was) Completed to Readiness to Be Plastered." Metal lath was in place. At the sale postponed from 11 March to 8 April 1933 Jesse Lewis Sowers, the Superintendent of Mails at the United States Post Office in Salisbury, bid the property in at \$2,905.00. The deed conveying the property to him is dated 19 April 1933 (Rowan Deeds, 219/493-94).<sup>6</sup>

Jesse Lewis Sowers (1904-1988) was one of five children born to Charlie George (1868-1955) and Susan Miller (1872-1963) Sowers and a grandson of Jesse and Mary (Swicegood) Sowers. He was a native of Rowan County, however, his parents and grandparents were natives of Davidson County and members of families prominent in the lower part of the county lying between Lexington and Salisbury. He was educated in the Salisbury public schools and the short-lived Salisbury Business College. Having been both a clerk and assistant Superintendent of Mails in the Salisbury post office, he became Superintendent of Mails in Salisbury in 1928, and he held the position until retiring in 1965. In 1933, when he purchased the unfinished Griffith house, he resided in a house at 208 West Lafayette Street which he shared with his parents.<sup>7</sup>

In 1934 he had the second-story rooms and a bathroom in the west wing of the Griffith-Sowers House plastered, the bathroom fitted with fixtures, and garage doors installed on the two-stall garage on ground level. The kitchen and an adjoining room, now the family dining room, on the west wing's first story were apparently already plastered and habitable. Mr. Sowers, his parents, and his younger sister Mary relocated here from the West Lafayette Street house which was then rented. This family arrangement was temporary.

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On 24 June 1936 Jesse Lewis Sowers was married to Ruth Elizabeth Stirewalt (1911-2004), a daughter of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther Stirewalt (1882-1960), who was then serving as pastor of St. John's Lutheran Church, Salisbury. The young couple purchased a turn-of-the-century frame cottage at 209 South Ellis Street, Salisbury (Rowan Deeds, 231/294), repaired, redecorated, and furnished its rooms, and occupied the house in September 1936. They remained here until 1940 when further improvements were undertaken at the Griffith-Sowers House and the Ellis Street house was sold (Rowan Deeds, 250/291). The couple had become the parents of two sons: Charles Lewis Sowers (b. 1937) and John Luther Sowers (b. 1940).

Jesse Lewis Sowers, and, later, Mrs. Sowers recorded the expenses associated with the purchase of the one-story house at 209 South Ellis Street, its refurbishment, and those reflecting the completion and upkeep of the Griffith-Sowers House, the Kepley farm house, and other buildings on the country property from 1933 into 2000 in a small cloth-bound ledger.<sup>8</sup> The finishing out of the Griffith-Sowers House occupied a shorter period, from 1933 until 1960-1962, when the east wing, including the music room on the first story and a "Guest Chamber" and adjoining bathroom on the second story were completed. This second-story suite was occupied then by John Luther Sowers and it remains his bedroom to the present. Among Mr. Sowers' earliest entries in his ledger are "Misc. Improvements" of \$816 in 1933 together with a new barn at \$180 and work on the Kepley farmhouse costing \$160. The unidentified improvements were probably to secure the house while those for the Kepley farmhouse were made for its occupation by a tenant laborer. The barn is believed to be the one now standing on Kepley Road outside the nomination boundary.

During most of this period from 1940 through January 1963, the Griffith-Sowers House was occupied by two essentially separate households. After Mr. Sowers' marriage in 1936 the west wing of the house remained the residence of his parents to the death of his father, Charlie George Sowers, on 17 April 1955, and the home of his mother until her death on 22 January 1963. The two principal rooms on the wing's second story, labeled "Study" and "Maids Room" on the 1930 floor plan, never served their intended purpose; they were bedrooms from 1934 to 1963.

With his relocation to the house in spring 1940, Mr. Sowers mounted a sustained finishing effort which continued to October 1942. During this period, the first- and second-story stair halls and the rooms on the west side of the halls in the main block were plastered and finished out. The architectural millwork and doors were supplied by the Rowan Lumber and Supply Company, and Goodman Lumber Company was the source of the flooring and other materials. When Mr. Sowers purchased the house, the three cupboards and mantel in the proposed Griffith dining room had been installed. Mr. and Mrs. Sowers used it instead as their living room and that use continues to the present. The couple occupied the bedroom above their living room as their bed chamber while their sons shared a bedroom in the



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“Study” in the west wing. As the house came into use without the intended servants, the butler’s pantry, located at the west end of the house’s T-plan first-story hall and linking the kitchen with the proposed Griffith dining room, was not finished according to Mr. Bloxam’s plan. Instead, it became a service hall while the area designated for a servant’s sink here was partitioned as a lavatory/utility room. With his mother in control of the designated kitchen in the west wing, Mr. Sowers installed a simple, yet serviceable kitchen for his wife and their family in the east end of the first-story hall, in the space north of the proposed Griffith living room. Whether the remaining part of the back hall, with windows looking out on the brick terrace of the portico was used temporarily for dining or sitting is unclear. In time, in about the mid-1940s, the walls of the Griffith living room were temporarily covered with celotex and wallpaper; the north end of the room, adjoining the simple kitchen was used for dining while Jesse Lewis Sowers and his family used the south end of the large room as a sitting area.

Between September 1948 and February 1949, Mr. Sowers saw to the complete finishing of the two major rooms on the west side of the hall. The Salisbury Lumber and Supply Company milled poplar logs cut on the farm into paneling for the large first-story room and provided white oak flooring, millwork, and other necessary finishing materials for both rooms and the adjoining master bathroom on the second story. The Salisbury firm of L. S. Bradshaw and Sons executed the plasterwork. The now-paneled first-story room continued in use as a dining and sitting room while the designated “Master Chamber” above became the bedroom of Charles Sowers. It was not until March through June 1958 that the master bathroom was fully fitted with fixtures and fittings as was the powder room below on the first story.

The finishing and decorating of the house’s east wing occurred in an extended effort between March 1960 and October 1962. The aforementioned Salisbury firms, L. S. Bradshaw and Sons, Salisbury Lumber and Supply Company, and Goodman Lumber Company, provided materials, labor, and services, including milling farm-cut logs into paneling that was installed in Mr. Griffith’s proposed “Music Room” and the bedroom above it. On completion the bedroom and adjoining bathroom on the second story were occupied by the Sowers’s younger son, Luther, who uses them to the present.

The death of Susan Miller Sowers on 22 January 1963 ended the two-household occupation of the Griffith-Sowers House. From that point until the present the house has served as the single family residence of Jesse Lewis Sowers, his wife, and their youngest son through Mr. Sowers’s death in 1988 and that of Ruth Stirewalt Sowers in 2004. Doing so exceeded the intention of James Francis Griffith, who in 1930 saw the large country house as home for himself and Mrs. Griffith. There were bedrooms designated on the plans for a maid and guests but none for children. In February 1963 Mr. Sowers launched his last major project at the house. Over the course of six months, the hall kitchen was

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dismantled and fixtures from it and the aged Mrs. Sowers' kitchen were relocated to the basement. Oak flooring was laid in the east end of the hall and its appearance was made consistent with that of the remainder of the first-story hall. The house's planned kitchen was remodeled and furnished with new appliances, fittings, and cabinets. These remain in place. The room on the south side of the kitchen, designated on the 1930 plan as two rooms, a breakfast room and pantry, that had been Mrs. Susan Sowers' sitting room, was redecorated and came into use as the family dining room. The remainder of the house continued in its then current use.

Beginning in 1933, with his purchase of the property, Lewis Sowers carried on farming operations here in the fields and meadows with the help of a tenant who worked as a farm laborer and lived in the Kepley family house. Mr. Sowers recorded little of these operations in his ledger except for expenditures on the tenant house, income from crops in 1937 and 1938, and incidental information. The first agricultural entries occur in 1933 when improvements were made to the tenant house costing \$160 and a new barn was built at a cost of \$180. In 1935 Mr. Sowers paid \$200 for terracing work, principally in the fields south and west of the house, which remain open meadows today. The first tenant family was that of Robert and Josie Tabor. From the onset of farming operations, cotton was the principal cash crop and it remained so into the early 1950s when cotton lost its profitability because of the boll weevil and the Tabors moved to Salisbury. In both 1937 and 1938, the only years for which specific agricultural income is known, cotton accounted for nearly one-half of the modest farm income, \$549.08 in 1937 and \$445.26 in 1938, followed by pork, butter and honey. Cotton was grown in the large field overlooking the Statesville road, in the field west of the barn, and another on Kepley Road. The tenant raised vegetables in a garden about midway between his house and the new/present barn, and an orchard, mainly of apple trees, was planted in an open meadow between the Griffith-Sowers House and the Kepley house. An aged pear tree survives to the present.

For the longest period of his ownership, from ca. 1950 to about 1986, Jesse Lewis Sowers raised registered Aberdeen Angus cattle on the farm. He sold heifers and bull calves to others for stock raising; he did not sell his animals into the beef market. The large field west of the barn and a smaller one adjoining it on the south were planted in grass and put in use as pasture. Another large field, due north of the house, which had been fallow, was graded, planted in grass and also used for pasture. The large open field to the west of the driveway, leading north from the highway, was cultivated as a grass meadow for hay, while the smaller field on the east side of the drive was used as a supplementary pasture. The other fields on the property were put in use as either pasture or for hay. The original portion of the expansive frame barn (#5), standing west of the house and the studio (#3), providing stabling for the family milk cows, was expanded to the west and north, time and time again through the years, and lastly in association with the Angus cattle operations. Today all of the open areas, including the former pastures and hay meadows retain their grass cover.

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The grounds of the Griffith-Sowers House have remained the acreage purchased by Mr. Sowers in April 1933 except for a sale in 1943 and three much smaller sales in 1951, 1952, and 1965 associated with a series of easements on the property. In March 1943 the Sowers sold the somewhat isolated acreage lying on the west side of Walnut Branch, comprising about twelve acres, to Ira Henry Barringer and his wife (Rowan Deeds, 270/211). Beginning in 1949 Mr. and Mrs. Sowers granted a series of easements for the transmission of natural gas in underground pipelines. The first of the easements was conveyed in 1949 to the Transcontinental Gas Pipe Line Corporation; it was in the form of a nearly straight path, seventy-five feet wide, carrying diagonally across the southeast corner of the holding (Rowan Deeds, 322/84). Two years later, in July 1951, the Sowers and Dr. Martin Luther Stirewalt, who held a mortgage on the property, conveyed a square tract, measuring 100 feet on its four sides, partially atop the above easement and located on the extreme east edge of the farm, beside Kepley Road, to the Transcontinental Corporation for the purpose of erecting a metering station on its line (Rowan Deeds, 349/128-130). In September 1952, the company purchased a very small adjoining triangular-shaped parcel on the south side of the 1951 purchase, described in the deed as “.005 acres of land,” to expand its metering operations (Rowan Deeds, 363/53-55). On 29 June 1965 Jesse Lewis and Ruth Sowers executed two deeds with the Piedmont Natural Gas Company associated with the construction of a gas pipeline feeding off the Transcontinental line to a large textile plant built some two and one-half miles to the west. One deed conveyed a small quadrangular-shaped parcel of unspecified acreage on the south side of the Transcontinental metering station to the Piedmont Natural Gas Company (Rowan Deeds, 499/335). This tract was the connection point between the two lines, and the Piedmont Company erected a small metering station on it. The second deed recorded a right-of-way agreement, fifty feet in width, for the installation of the gas pipeline following a generally east/west path through the meadow on the south front of the Griffith-Sowers House grounds (Rowan Deeds, 500/82-83).<sup>9</sup>

Preceding the death of Mr. Sowers's mother in January 1963, the family circle lessened with the departure of the couple's two sons for college. Charles Sowers attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, whence he graduated in 1959 from the business school. He relocated to Charlotte to work, before returning to Salisbury where he was married and established his own accounting firm. In 1958 Luther Sowers traveled to Philadelphia where he attended Tyler School of Art at Temple University. He received a bachelor of fine arts degree in 1962 and continued with a year of graduate study at Temple University. In 1963 he transferred to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he continued his graduate studies as an arts educator in a program that included a teaching position in the public schools. His posting was to Wilson, and in 1964 he took a full-time position at R. L. Fike High School, Wilson, which he held through the spring term of 1974. In 1972, Luther Sowers erected a one-story frame studio to the west of the house, between it and the barn, that forms the core of the expanded studio building (#3). In 1974 he returned home, lived with his parents,

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and gave private art lessons for about a year, before undertaking his costuming work for films, principally military uniforms and equipment, museum work, and other work in the arts that remains his profession to the present. In 1976 he was commissioned to execute bronze doors for the façade of St. John's Lutheran Church, Salisbury, overlooking West Innes Street. The doors, cast in the foundry added to the studio here and comprising paired panels for the double-leaf center entrance and single-panel doors in the flanking doorways, were dedicated on 25 September 1977 (Agner, 401-02).

Jessie Lewis Sowers, who had retired from the United States Postal Service as Superintendent of Mails in Salisbury, died on 10 September 1988 and was buried from St. John's Church in Chestnut Hill Cemetery, Salisbury. His widow, Ruth Sowers, who had a thirty-year career in the Rowan County public school system, inherited the Griffith-Sowers House and its grounds. She lived here with her younger son until her death on 24 January 2004. She was buried beside her husband in Chestnut Hill Cemetery. Mrs. Sowers devised her estate equally to her two sons, who are the owners of this property. John Luther Sowers, a bachelor, lives alone in the Griffith-Sowers House to the present. He continues to work in costuming for films, television, and museums. The maid's room on the 1930 plan is his principal work room. The second-story bedrooms, excepting his own, are used for uniform and costume storage, as is the proposed music room in the east wing, and a portion of the basement area of the house.

## Architectural Significance

The Griffith-Sowers House occupies an important and unique place in the architectural history of Rowan County, North Carolina, holds local significance in the area of architecture, and meets National Register Criterion C. The Griffith-Sowers House is an important example of twentieth-century interwar period building in Rowan County, reflecting both the Colonial and Classical Revival styles popular in the period and country house architecture of which it is one of two significant surviving examples in the county. The house, located about seven miles west of Salisbury, was designed for James Francis Griffith and his wife in 1930 by the English-born Salisbury engineer Percy Bloxam. Alfred Ross Lazenby, the prominent Salisbury contractor of the early-twentieth century, began its construction in either late 1930 or early 1931. By 1932 he had completed the flush-sheathed exterior of the house, covered it with a slate roof, and brought the partitioned, sub-floored interior to the point it was ready for plaster when the Griffiths suffered financial reverses and defaulted on a mortgage. At that time it was the largest house in rural Rowan County and one whose size and ambition was equaled or exceeded only by the Hambley-Wallace House (NR, 1997) and the Walter Franklin McCanless House, both in Salisbury. On Saturday, 8 April 1933, the house and grounds of 137.85 acres was

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offered at auction at the county courthouse door and bid in by Jesse Lewis Sowers, a bachelor employee of the United State Postal Service in Salisbury.

In 1934 rooms in the west service wing were plastered and occupied by Mr. Sowers and his parents, Charlie and Susan Sowers, who resided in the wing until their deaths in 1955 and 1963, respectively. With his marriage in 1936 Mr. Sowers and his wife acquired a house in Salisbury at 208 South Ellis Street (see Salisbury Historic District, NR, 1975). In late spring 1940, Mr. Sowers, his wife, and their eldest son occupied the west half of the house's main block. By October 1942 the first- and second-story halls and the west half of the main block were plastered and their architectural finish completed. Next, in a series of projects between 1948 and 1962, the east half of the main block and the east wing of the house were finished out and occupied by the family. Following the death of Mrs. Susan Sowers in January 1963, the house designed as the residence of Mr. Griffith, his wife, and a live-in maid/housekeeper, was occupied for the first time as a single-family residence.

The Colonial and Classical Revival styles, seen in the design and finish of the Griffith-Sowers House gained their identity and national popularity contemporaneously in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. The Colonial Revival style saw its earliest and most sustained expression in residential architecture, where designers and builders freely adopted and adapted the generally classical architectural vocabulary of the American Colonial period and the Federal styling of the early national period, as well as features of the American Greek Revival style. Doing so, they produced buildings of appealing character, a balanced if not insistently precise symmetry in their plans and elevations, and classical detailing that included both literal representations and imaginative, free adaptations of admired features of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century buildings. The features of the Colonial Revival style appeared first in the finish of Queen Anne- and Shingle-style buildings in the 1870s, however, the style quickly gained its own distinct identity, and enjoyed wide popularity in its several modes, including the Georgian Revival style, up to World War II (and beyond).

The Classical Revival style was likewise defined by an adherence to symmetry and balance, and the classical orders of ancient Greek and Roman architecture, the architecture of Renaissance Italy, and the works of Andrea Palladio. Coinciding in its American popularity with Beaux Arts classicism, the Classical Revival style gained unparalleled status as the favored style at the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893. Thereafter, the Classical Revival style was widely adopted for the design of public and institutional buildings, churches and synagogues, and educational buildings whose elevations were enhanced with its signature hallmark, a two-story or giant-order portico. The Rowan County Courthouse and the former United States Post Office and Courthouse, both in Salisbury, are important expressions of the style. The relative costliness of Classical Revival-style architecture generally limited its adoption for domestic architecture, and saw expression most often in domestic

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architecture in combination with the Colonial Revival style, when handsome porticos, porches, and colonnades enriched the facades and elevations of brick, frame, or stone houses from the 1890s through the 1930s.

The Griffith-Sowers House reflects this important combination of the Colonial and Classical Revival styles in a domestic building and it is the only surviving house in rural Rowan County that features a two-story portico/loggia in its design. While it shares a certain kinship with the now-lost White-Hamilton House at Mount Ulla, where a two-story portico and one-story wraparound porch were added in the 1910s to an 1860s brick house, the design of the Griffith-Sowers House reflects a more accomplished stylishness. In its massing, composition, symmetry, and finish the house, and particularly its eleven-bay south facade, reflect the signal features of the Colonial Revival style, including the hierarchy of component parts that distinguish the best examples of the style. The realization of a five-part composition incorporates gable-front wings, which are recessed behind the center block and project on the north elevation, where they frame the two-story Classical Revival-style loggia. This combination of geometry, symmetry, and spare classical finish continues on the interior of this remarkably intact, well-preserved house, whose siting, scale, and fabric, including its flush-sheathed elevations also set it apart as an important example of country house architecture of the interwar period. The circumstances of its history prevented the development of ancillary features, including gardens, complementing outbuildings, and other enhancements that were common features of the country house movement, however, Jesse Lewis Sowers saw to completion this important Rowan County example of country house architecture.

The Colonial and Classical Revival styles appeared in Rowan County almost simultaneously around the turn of the twentieth century in the architectural composition and/or decorative finish of late Queen Anne-style houses. The Louis H. Clement House at 302 South Ellis Street, Salisbury, built in about 1899, is an early, lavish example of the melding of these styles. Another important early reflection of this stylistic amalgam is the two-story-with attic frame house built at 208 South Fulton Street, Salisbury, for Milton Brown. Its Queen Anne-style form, with a three-stage octagonal corner tower capped by a bell-cast roof and an expansive one-story porch, reflects a degree of Colonial Revival-style symmetry in its fenestration and a gambrel-front wall dormer while its variant "Palladian" window was a common feature of both styles. Other houses of the period, whether large in scale or cottage-like, reflected a similar synthesis of elements.

As the eclecticism of the Queen Anne style gave way in the pre-World War I period, house builders in Salisbury and Rowan counties erected appealing examples of both Classical Revival- and Colonial Revival-style houses. Two-story giant-order porticoes, a distinguishing feature of the Classical Revival style, appeared soon in Salisbury on the handsome house designed by J. M. McMichael and built by

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Alfred Ross Lazenby at 202 South Fulton Street for Mr. Brown's sister, Mrs. David Franklin (Ella Williams Brown) Cannon in 1906 and on the brick residence of Judge R. Lee Wright, erected at 302 South Fulton Street in about 1912 to plans drawn by Charlotte architect Louis H. Asbury (1877-1975). James Francis Griffith, then resident a few blocks away, would have seen both houses being built as well as the United States Post Office and Courthouse of 1909-1911 and the Rowan County Courthouse of 1914 on Main Street, designed by A. Ten Eyck Brown of Atlanta.

Houses in the Colonial Revival style, mostly frame and of one or two stories, with symmetrical elevations, classically-detailed doorways, porches, and architectural finish, and often covered with hip roofs, proved to be more popular in Salisbury, Rowan County, and its smaller towns. The now-lost, two-story frame house with a balustraded widow's walk and lavish architectural finish completed in 1900 in the 200 block of West Horah Street, Salisbury, for the Reverend Dr. Francis Johnstone Murdoch (1846-1909) is an early, elegant example of the Colonial Revival-style house. Another important example is the two-and-a-half-story brick manse, with a five-bay facade, pedimented gable ends, and handsome Doric porches on both West Innes and South Jackson streets, completed for the minister of First Presbyterian Church in 1913. However, the style was expressed more often in simpler versions such as the ca. 1915 Reamus-Hambley House at 602 Fulton Avenue (see Fulton Heights HD, NR, 1999) and in the 1913 remodeling of two houses at 310 and 314 South Ellis Street by Louis H. Clement in a spare Colonial Revival-style fashion complementing his own elegant house at 302 South Ellis Street. The Paul Tallmadge Goodman House, erected about 1916 near Gold Hill, is one of the finest examples in the Rowan countryside, which is punctuated with occasional, substantial Colonial Revival-style houses.

The combination of the Colonial and Classical Revival styles in Rowan County's domestic architecture continued through the 1920s and into the 1930s, culminating, it can be argued, in the Griffith-Sowers House. One such example, erected in Salisbury in 1923-25 in the west corner of Innes and Fulton streets, two blocks from Mr. Griffith's Church Street residence, was well-known to the future house-builder. In about 1923 English-born architect Sir Alfred Charles Bossom (1881-1965) drew the plans for an elegant new residence for Walter Henderson Woodson (1875-1964) and his wife Pauline Bernhardt (1879-1942).<sup>10</sup> The design of the Woodson House is based on that of the Morris-Jumel Mansion, a grand Georgian country house built by Colonel Roger Morris in 1765 and remodeled ca. 1810 by Stephen and Eliza Jumel, that stands today on residual grounds above West 160<sup>th</sup> Street in New York City. Its elegant classical portico, its flush-sheathed elevations, and its general proportions were recast in the house occupied by the Woodsons and their four sons in 1925.

In early 1930, when Francis Griffith was planning this house, Salisbury had no known resident architect. For the design of his new house, Mr. Griffith turned to Percy Bloxam, who was trained in



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England as an engineer and had undertaken architectural design work since his arrival in Salisbury in about 1924. The Griffith-Sowers House is possibly the only known surviving building designed by Mr. Bloxam alone. Percy Bloxam (1888-1943) was born in Chesham, Buckinghamshire, England, the son of John and Sarah (Richardson) Bloxam. He immigrated to the United States in 1920.<sup>11</sup> By 1923 Mr. Bloxam and his family had relocated to Salisbury, which would be his penultimate place of residence in North Carolina. On 28 February 1924 the *Salisbury Evening Post* reported that Mr. Bloxam had formed a partnership with Willard G. Rogers (ca. 1863-1947), the Charlotte-based architect who had earlier worked in partnership with Charles Christian Hook (1870-1938). Mr. Bloxam was to have charge of the Salisbury office while Mr. Hook would remain in Charlotte. On 18 September 1924, Mr. Bloxam and his wife Olive Wide Bloxam separately purchased lots of the P. C. Wood subdivision in west Salisbury where they lived (Rowan Deeds, 182/226-27). On 14 December 1924 the *Salisbury Evening Post* carried a story on the firm's work that included a ten-story limestone-clad building, the new Elizabeth School, and an addition to the Dilworth School, all in Charlotte. The character and extent of the partnership's work remains to be confirmed, however, one important client was Catawba College, which had recently relocated its campus from Newton to Salisbury. Drawings for the college gymnasium survive, bearing the name of both Mr. Roger and Mr. Bloxam and dated to 1925; the gymnasium, now lost but standing as late as 1984, was built in 1926, after Mr. Rogers withdrew his association with Mr. Bloxam on the Catawba College work in March of that year. Zartman Hall, a dormitory erected in 1926, was also designed by the partnership. A house for the college president, the third campus building known to have been designed by the partnership, was succeeded by the present president's residence built in 1930. The partnership between Mr. Rogers and Mr. Bloxam appears to have ended in 1926, and in 1927 Mr. Bloxam and Catawba College ended their association. Except for Mr. Bloxam's identification as president of the Percy Bloxam Company on a deed in 1934, there is little known record of his professional work in the 1930s. By 1941, when he and Mrs. Bloxam sold property they had acquired in 1924 (Rowan Deeds, 259/223), they were living in Roxboro, Person County, North Carolina, where Mr. Bloxam ended his professional career as city manager. Percy Bloxam died in Roxboro at the age of fifty-five on 29 May 1943, and his body was buried in the city's Burchwood Cemetery.<sup>12</sup>

The career of Alfred Ross Lazenby (1867-1943), the resident Salisbury builder of the Griffith-Sowers House, is better known yet also incomplete. Mr. Lazenby, the son of Humphrey B. and Elizabeth (Tomlinson) Lazenby was born in Iredell County and grew up in Statesville where he is said to have begun work as a contractor in the late 1880s. After his marriage in 1899 he relocated to Salisbury where he carried on a prominent and successful contracting business until his death, erecting an important series of buildings that remain as landmarks in town and country. He gained important status early in this period in the Rowan County seat with the construction of a Chateausque-style mansion for Egbert Barry Cornwall Hambley at 508 South Fulton Street (NR, 1997), completed in 1903 in

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partnership with his brother. The Classical Revival-style house built at 202 South Fulton Street for Mrs. David Franklin Cannon in 1906 was another of his early domestic projects of which the vast majority remains to be documented. His construction of institutional and commercial buildings is better recorded and these include the Washington Building and the Empire Hotel on Salisbury's Main Street and the Central Methodist Church in Spencer. Other important early twentieth-century buildings, including churches for Salisbury's First Baptist and First Methodist congregations, the Whitehead-Stokes Hospital, and the Ellis Street High School, are lost. His work here for Francis Griffith is the last known important building of his career. Given the financial reverses suffered by Mr. Griffith in 1932, which forced the sale of this unfinished house, Mr. Lazenby probably also came to disadvantage in this relationship. In 1941 he was named city building inspector, and he was serving in that position when he died on 14 November 1943.<sup>13</sup>

Mr. Griffith's decision to build a house in the countryside west of Salisbury links it to the American country house movement that flourished from the late nineteenth-century through the 1930s. The Griffith House dates to the last decade of the movement when the economic conditions that developed into the Great Depression either curtailed construction by those who suffered its woes, or enabled others, who were wealthy and had escaped difficulty, to utilize a depressed building industry to their advantage and build better, larger houses and estates than they might have in the competitive environment of the 1920s. In this instance, Mr. Griffith's financial reverses resulted in default and the forced sale of his unfinished house at auction, and its completion between 1933 and 1962 by Mr. Sowers. In other compromised projects of this period the finish of houses was sometimes lessened in quality, or wings of houses were left unbuilt. After accepting the fact that North Carolina became the location of Biltmore, the largest country house built in the United States, at the outset of this period, the movement spawned the construction of relatively few country houses in North Carolina outside the suburban residential parks, such as Reynolda Park, in Winston-Salem, that were often anchored by golf or country clubs. Richard Joshua Reynolds' Reynolda estate at Winston-Salem and Cameron Morrison's Morrocroft near Charlotte are important reflections of a sophisticated adoption of rural life in this state, as is Boxwood Lodge (NR, 1995) nearby in Davie County, which replaced a simpler hunting box on the property. In other instances wealthy estate-makers acquired older rural houses and remade, rebuilt, and enlarged them and often added gardens to their expansive grounds. Two examples reflect the range of this country house place-making. In Brunswick County the Sprunt family overbuilt and embellished Orton Plantation, with the help of architect Kenneth M. Murchison, and created an elegant historic retreat from life in Wilmington. In western North Carolina, in Henderson County, the Mallett family refitted Bryn Avon (NR, 1999) in the English Manorial Style and added a terraced boxwood garden.

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The architectural styling of country houses in North Carolina generally followed patterns seen elsewhere in the nation, and it was repeated here in Rowan County. Most country houses and their attendant outbuildings were designed in one of two principal overarching styles: The Manorial mode, reflecting both English and French traditions, as well as the Tudor and Norman revivals, was adopted for the design of Graylyn in Winston-Salem of 1929-1932, smaller estates in Reynolda Park, for Morrocroft in Charlotte, Bryn Avon in Henderson County, and with half-timbering at Eastover of ca. 1934-1935 near China Grove in Rowan County. The Colonial Revival-style, incorporating features of the Classical Revival style, was adopted for the design of Boxwood Lodge in adjoining Davie County, and Orton Plantation near Wilmington, while a very appealing combination of the Colonial Revival and Craftsman styles appears in the design of the Reynolda Estate. The design of the Griffith-Sowers House reflects the handsome synthesis of the Colonial Revival and Classical Revival styles.

In its local context, Rowan County, the Griffith-Sowers House is one of two important country houses erected in the 1930s that are distinct from other substantial rural or village houses of the period, such as the John Carlyle Sherrill House of 1938 at Mt. Ulla, that were erected for country merchants and leading farmers. The circumstances that prompted Francis Griffith to undertake the construction of this house remain unclear, however, the fact that he had three large reception rooms on the first story, including a music room for recitals and home performances, suggests that he and Mrs. Griffith were expecting to entertain and dispense hospitality on a generous scale. But they were never to occupy the house. Eastover, Rowan County's second country house, was erected to plans drawn in 1934 by Louis H. Asbury for Hearne Swink (see Hood, 220-21). The Manorial-style brick house, with a half-timber gable and other decorative flourishes, was built on generous wooded grounds on the west side of US 29 and north of China Grove. Mr. Swink (1900-1975) was an executive with Cannon Mills.

## Endnotes

1. An account of Dr. Griffith's professional career in Salisbury was published in a catalogue of the town's business concerns and offices in a special edition of the *Carolina Watchman* in January 1885. James Shober Brawley reprinted the accounts in his bicentennial history of Rowan County, *The Rowan Story, 1753-1953: A Narrative History of Rowan County, North Carolina*, "Dr. J. F. Griffith" appears on pages 255-57. In the account Dr. Griffith is described as a native of Forsyth County, however, in his wife's obituary he is identified as a native of Troy, Montgomery County. The latter is probably correct as the information was supplied to the *Salisbury Sunday Post* by his son. Elizabeth (Moose) Kluttz died on 10 October 1855, when her daughter Mary Elizabeth was under two years of age. In 1856 Caleb Kluttz married Mary A. L. Shuman, and after his death in 1857, Mary Elizabeth Kluttz was raised by her stepmother.

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2. The single most comprehensive source on the life of James Francis Griffith is his obituary published in the *Asheville Citizen* on 28 May 1960. Except for the year of his retirement, 1956, it contains no dates associated with his education or the posts he held as a musician at a series of churches culminating with a nineteen-year career as minister of music at Central Methodist Church, Asheville, whence he retired.
3. When Frank Reid Brown purchased the property on 14 December 1922 from John W. and Elizabeth W. Kepley it comprised two tracts (Rowan Deeds, 173/22). Both had been acquired by Elizabeth W. Kepley in October 1922. The first-named tract, 91.50 acres, was sold at auction at the Rowan County Courthouse in the settlement of Lawson Monroe Kepley's estate and conveyed by John W. Kepley, commissioner, to Elizabeth W. Kepley, the high bidder, for \$4,200 (Rowan Deeds, 168/193-94). This tract comprises the approximate center and western thirds of the acreage purchased by Mr. Griffith, and the site of the Griffith-Sowers House. It had been acquired in 1891 by Mr. Kepley from A. S. Earnhardt (Rowan Deeds, 74/244-45), who had purchased it at an auction at the Rowan County Courthouse on 19 February 1872 in the settlement of the estate of Moses Powlas (Rowan Deeds, 75/170-71). The second tract of fifty acres had a longer history in the Kepley family. Described as "Lot No. 7 in the division of the lands of J. N. Kepley deceased," it was conveyed by C. T. Kepley (1859-1932) to Martha Jane (Burrow) Kepley (1861-1939), the wife of Lawson M. Kepley, for \$500 (Rowan Deeds, 70/306-07). On 28 October 1922 she sold the property, including the house owned and once occupied by herself and her late husband, to Elizabeth W. Kepley for \$2,000 (Rowan Deeds, 172/213). The house and acreage had probably been rented since about 1900 when Lawson M. Kepley and his wife had moved into Salisbury. The two tracts remained discrete in the conveyances from December 1922 through those of 21 February and 1 March 1930. During the two-week period that Mr. Theodore Brown and the Rouzers held the property the two tracts were surveyed and combined into one parcel of 137.85 acres cited in the deed to Mr. and Mrs. Griffith. In the event the property that had been sold at the antebellum courthouse door in 1872 and that of its successor in 1922 would be sold for a third time at auction at the Rowan County Court House in 1933.
4. The drawings and specifications for the Griffith-Sowers House remain at the house.
5. Whether the Griffiths were then living in Salisbury or Ridgecrest is unconfirmed. His obituary mentions employment as a musician at churches in Wilmington, North Carolina, Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and Montclair, New Jersey. He probably held these positions between ca. 1932 and about 1937 when he and his wife relocated to Asheville, where he served as minister of music at Central Methodist Church in downtown Asheville until 1956. Mr. Griffith died

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childless on 26 May 1960 and was buried in Lewis Memorial Park, Asheville. Grace Griffith died on 6 February 1969 and was buried beside her husband.

6. Mr. Sowers also assumed the first mortgage of \$1,894 to the Greensboro Joint Stock Land Bank. The total price paid for the property was \$4,799 plus the 1932 Rowan County property taxes of \$32, which were paid by Mr. Sowers.
7. According to family tradition Jesse Lewis Sowers had the house erected on property which his parents purchased in 1924 from Archibald Henderson et al (Rowan Deeds, 183/140). On 14 November 1925, his parents conveyed "One six room dwelling house and three lots" to Mr. Sowers (Rowan Deeds, 218/222). On 17 August 1938 Jesse Lewis Sowers and his wife sold the house and its grounds to E. M. Cauble and his wife (Rowan Deeds, 242/343). It stands today.
8. This ledger was made available to the author during the preparation of this nomination.
9. Amendments to the right-of-way conveyance of 1940 with Transcontinental occurred in 1962 and 1969. Between 1997 and 2002, Mrs. Sowers conveyed five additional easements associated with the piping of natural gas in underground lines through her property. Three were conveyed to the Transcontinental corporation, one to Piedmont Natural Gas, and the fifth in 1998 to Frontier Energy, LLC, for the construction of a metering station that was erected south of those operated by the Transcontinental and Piedmont Natural Gas companies.
10. Mr. Bossom was also the architect for the contemporary First National Bank Building, 117 South Main Street, Salisbury, where a two-story arch-headed recess welcomes depositors. Mr. Woodson's brother, Ernest Woodson, was cashier at the bank at that time.
11. Apparently anticipating emigration to the United States, Mr. Bloxam came to this county in July 1920, sailing from Liverpool and arriving in New York City. On the passenger manifest for the S. S. Caronia his profession is listed as "Mech'l Engineer." The territorial extent of his search for relocation is not now known. Having returned to England and his home in Great Harwood, Lancashire, he set sail in December 1920 with his wife and the couple's three children on the S. S. Caronia; they arrived in New York on 31 December 1920. He had listed his profession as "Consulting Engineer" on the manifest and Rock Hill, South Carolina, as his final destination.
12. Percy Bloxam is listed as a consulting engineer in the 1924-1925 edition of the Salisbury city directory, resident at 324 Wiley Avenue, however, he does not appear in the 1926 city

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directory. His name reappears in the (next) 1929 directory, when he is residing on Statesville Road on property he had bought in 1924. Following a gap of six years, the next edition of the Salisbury directory was published in 1935, when Mr. Bloxam is listed as an engineer and residing in Milford Hills, a 1920s subdivision on the south side of Statesville Road, which appears to encompass or adjoin his 1924 purchase. By 1938, when the next edition of the directory was published, Mr. Bloxam had left Salisbury. Whether he and Mrs. Bloxam went directly from Salisbury to Roxboro is unclear. The term of Mr. Bloxam's service as city manager in Roxboro has not been confirmed. There are no known surviving issues of the local newspaper for the period of his death. Mrs. Bloxam apparently left Roxboro, and her whereabouts afterward are unknown. For the Catawba College work see letter of Judith G. Newman to Davyd Foard Hood, 27 June 1984, with related photocopies in the Catawba College Survey File, State Historic Preservation Office, Raleigh, North Carolina.

13. For a contracting business that spanned just over four decades in Salisbury, remarkably few of the buildings erected by Alfred Ross Lazenby have been documented through research. His obituary, published in the *Salisbury Post* on 15 November 1943 mentions only some of the buildings cited in this text together with the Rouzer building, the administration building at Catawba College, and "the original buildings of Misenheimer (now Pfeiffer) Junior College." The survival of this just-named group of buildings has not been confirmed. Mr. Lazenby's residence at 318 West Council Street is lost. He was buried in Chestnut Hill Cemetery.

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## 9. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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*Salisbury City Directory*, various printers, 1901-1955.

*Salisbury Post*, "Bloxam Forms An Association With Mr. Rogers," 28 February 1924.



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-----“Charlotte Gets \$400,000 BLD.,” 14 December 1924.  
-----“Beloved Woman Died Sunday P.M.,” 30 April 1928.  
-----“A. R. Lazenby Buried Today,” 15 November 1943.  
-----“Former Salisbury Musician Dies,” 2 June 1960.  
-----“Charlie Sowers Dies At Home,” 18 April 1955.  
-----“J. Lewis Sowers dead at 83,” 11 September 1988.  
-----“Rowan loses a dedicated servant,” 12 September 1988.  
-----“Ruth Stirewalt Sowers,” 28 January 2004.

Sowers, John Luther, letter to author, 4 January, 26 February, 16 July 2008.  
-----telephone conversation with author, 18 July, 20 July, 5 August 2008.

## 10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

### Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the acreage included in this nomination of the Griffith-Sowers House is defined by the heavy line on the accompanying tax map at a scale of one inch equals 200 feet.

### Boundary Justification

The boundary is drawn to include the site and setting of the Griffith-Sowers House and its outbuildings, including the fields, pastures, and woodlands that are historically associated with the house, that enframe it and its outbuildings, and comprise critical immediate parts of its view shed. While the current parcel for this house includes approximately 121 acres, the boundary has been drawn to reflect the general limits on acreage included with a property nominated solely for Criterion C accepted by the National Park Service, and to exclude modern intrusions. The east boundary follows an historic property line south along Kepley Road from a farm lane to the edge of a pipeline easement. The boundary is drawn to exclude the southeast quadrant of the parcel, which includes the fenced structures, exposed pipes, and other features associated with a series of metering stations serving underground pipelines. The south boundary follows a generally east-west path along the south edge of the woodland that protects the house and its grounds from view from Statesville Boulevard. About midway, the boundary extends south to Statesville Boulevard to incorporate the estate drive and the hedgerow on its east side. The open fields in the southwest quadrant of the parcel has been excluded due to the large, intrusive dirt berm recently constructed, running roughly parallel to the south boundary line, to block the view to the house from a new housing development to the west. The west

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property line follows the bed of a dry creek on a woodland edge, to its junction with a creek in the northwest corner of the nominated acreage. The north boundary carries east from the dry creek bed along a spring-fed stream that flows through the woodland to the north side of the house and then along the path of a farm lane to join Kepley Road, thus providing a woodland edge to the vista from the loggia at the rear of the house.

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## PHOTOGRAPHS

The following information applies to all of the photographs included in this nomination.

1. Names of property: Griffith-Sowers House
2. Location: 5050 Statesville Blvd., Salisbury vicinity, Rowan County, North Carolina
3. Name of photographer: Davyd Foard Hood
4. Dates of photographs: 26-27 January 2008
5. Location of original negatives: Division of Archives and History  
109 East Jones Street  
Raleigh, North Carolina 27601
- 6.-7.: Views
  - A. Overall view, looking north through front lawn onto south facade of the house (#2).
  - B. View of the south facade and east elevation of the main block and east wing, looking northwest.
  - C. View of the west wing and west gable end of main block, looking east/northeast.
  - D. View of the north elevation, looking west/southwest.
  - E. View of front, south entrance, looking southeast from living room.
  - F. View in the living room (dining room on plan) with mantel on west wall and built-in china cabinets in southeast and southwest corners, looking south.
  - G. View in sitting room (living room on plan), looking north.
  - H. View of stair rising to second story, looking north.
  - I. View of second-story landing at head of the stair, looking east/southeast.

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- J. View of service stair in basement, which links it to the kitchen with the secondary flight to the left and to the garage through the horizontal panel door at the head of the staircase.
  - K. John Luther Sowers Studio (#3), looking northwest.
  - L. Landscape view with barn (#5) in center and studio (#3) on right, looking northwest.
  - M. Poultry house (#4), looking north.